



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
ONE WINTER STREET, BOSTON, MA 02108 617-292-5500

MITT ROMNEY
Governor

KERRY HEALEY
Lieutenant Governor

ELLEN ROY HERZFELDER
Secretary

ROBERT W. GOLLEDGE, Jr.
Commissioner

January 29, 2004

Dear Citizen,

I am pleased to announce the release of the study "Fish Mercury Levels in Northeastern Massachusetts" which has been posted on the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) internet site at <http://www.state.ma.us/dep/ors/files/chemical.htm> or <http://www.state.ma.us/dep/bwp/hgres.htm>. This report is part of DEP's ongoing work, funded by legislative appropriations in support of the Commonwealth's commitments under the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers' Action Plans for reducing mercury pollution and acid rain deposition. The Regional Mercury Action Plan, as well as the MA Zero Mercury Strategy, were adopted to address the very problem highlighted in this study—extensive contamination of fish, as well as other wildlife, with toxic mercury. Mercury is of great concern to DEP because it is very toxic, particularly to the fetus and to children, where it can damage the developing brain. Mercury also concentrates into fish to levels that are hundreds of thousands of times greater than its level in water. Therefore, although fish may have unsafe levels of mercury, drinking water is rarely impacted. Mercury also persists in the environment once released.

We have made substantial progress reducing mercury pollution since these plans were adopted. For example, MA has reduced mercury emissions to the environment by municipal waste and medical waste incinerators, previously the largest sources in MA, by over 92%. However, although substantial progress has been made here in MA, the mercury problem has not been solved. DEP remains committed to further efforts to reduce mercury releases to the environment and to better understand mercury's impacts.

The study released today presents the latest DEP analyses of mercury levels in freshwater fish, with a focus on lakes and ponds in the Merrimack Valley (MV). As part of DEP's mercury monitoring program, fish from 26 waterbodies in the MV were tested for mercury levels in 1999 to determine if fish consumption advisories were needed to protect public health. Results from this effort were immediately used to determine that fish consumption advisories were in fact needed for 23 of the lakes and ponds in the study (it is important to note that mercury levels in the water of lakes and ponds with mercury contaminated fish are typically well below drinking water standards). This area was targeted in response to public concern and because the 1998 Regional Mercury Study indicated that the northeast part of MA was subject to historically high levels of mercury deposition.

This information is available in alternate format. Call Debra Doherty, ADA Coordinator at 617-292-5565. TDD Service - 1-800-298-2207.

DEP on the World Wide Web: <http://www.mass.gov/dep>

Printed on Recycled Paper

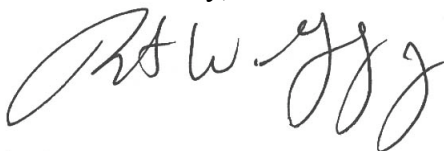
Today's report is a follow-up to this work. It presents a statistical assessment of the data collected, which indicate that mercury levels in fish in the MV, a historically industrialized and highly populated area, were higher than those found in less industrialized and populated areas in the state. This data is important, as it emphasizes the significance of the mercury problem and provides a baseline for following trends in fish mercury levels in response to the significant reduction in mercury pollution in the MV and the rest of the state.

These results provide further evidence of mercury's deleterious impacts on the MA environment and support DEP's continued aggressive efforts to reduce mercury pollution. These efforts are now focused on regulations limiting mercury emissions from coal-fired utilities and a cooperative program with the MA Dental Society to reduce mercury amalgam releases from the dental sector. Other pollution prevention efforts are also underway, including school mercury cleanouts and municipal collections funded by DEP and the municipal solid waste combustors (MSWCs). The MSWCs are now working on their 2004 mercury source separation plans, as required by DEP regulations. Public meetings on these plans are being held in late January and early February, 2004. We encourage citizens who live in communities serviced by these facilities to participate (please call Lori Segall at 617-292-5704 for further information).

Additional reports on trends in mercury levels in fish and the environment will be published over the next year as further statistical analyses and sampling are completed. DEP is also working with EPA and the other New England states to update mercury emission inventories, deposition modeling and deposition monitoring. DEP will also continue to work with Department of Public Health and others to continue outreach and education about mercury.

Because of the commitment of the Administration and the MA legislature, the Commonwealth is recognized as a leader in addressing mercury pollution. Although there is work yet to be done, we as a state have made major progress reducing mercury pollution. It is our intent to stay the course until the job is done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Golledge, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Robert W. Golledge, Jr.

For more information about mercury see the following websites:

<http://www.state.ma.us/dep/bwp/hgres.htm>

<http://www.state.ma.us/dph/beha/mercury/merchp.htm>

<http://www.healthbenchmarks.org/Mercury/>

<http://www.newmoa.org/Newmoa/htdocs/prevention/mercury/>

<http://www.epa.gov/oar/mercury.html>

<http://books.nap.edu/books/0309071402/html/index.html>

<http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/default.htm>